



Masiello Tightens Ranks — Hybrid Attacks, Sabotage and Interference. The Risk of Sliding into Open Conflict

The Italian Army Chief of Staff: “We are at war—hybrid, but still war.” On the risks of disinformation: “We are about to distribute a cognitive self-defense manual to our personnel.”

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Editor's note: The **three articles** to be published on **Brigatafolgore.net** draw on and develop the content of the extensive interview given by the Italian Army Chief of Staff, General Carmine Masiello, to *Corriere della Sera* on October 4, 2026. Two and a half years after taking office, the General has established a clear and rigorous doctrinal framework, demonstrating a full awareness of the complex threats facing Italy. This analysis underscores the need to **strengthen the land component** which, unlike the naval and air components, has historically faced—according to international analysts' assessments and

benchmarks—a greater need to close capability gaps and increase its resources in order to withstand the impact of modern conflicts.

«**Strengthen public information and awareness of hybrid warfare**, starting with those who wear the uniform. As Army Chief of Staff, I feel its urgency because of the consequences it may have for my soldiers. **We are at war. Hybrid, but war nonetheless**». Lieutenant General Carmine Masiello does not mince words when confronting an existing threat, even as he leads the most far-reaching transformation of the Army in the modern era. Explaining the nature of these dangers, Masiello says: «Those who wage it **wear down their adversary without giving them a pretext to respond**, constantly testing how far they can go before triggering a response. **The risk, however, is real: not only suffering its effects, but inadvertently sliding into open confrontation**». The statistical and factual picture is clear: «**Severe cyberattacks have increased by nearly 50% globally and by more than 40% in Italy**. Alongside cyber, there is everything else: sabotage of infrastructure and undersea cables, disruption of satellite signals, systematic violations of Allied airspace, and interference in election campaigns. Then there is disinformation, which infiltrates decision-making processes—not only military, but also political, economic, and social—corrupting at the source the information on which a community bases its choices».

The target and the handbook: cognitive self-defense against smartphones

The primary target of this strategy is not weapons, but the individual: «**The main objective of these activities is to undermine a country's cohesion**, and the most exposed link is neither a weapons system nor infrastructure: **it is the individual person. The vector is the smartphone that each of us carries in our pocket**, through which we access information and form our opinions.» To counter this threat, the Army has decided to take concrete action: «**We are about to distribute a handbook to all Army personnel: a “cognitive self-defense manual”**», built around a few essential steps. Recognize the emotional triggers exploited by disinformation, because it first stirs your emotions and then persuades you. Spot the warning signs, because haste is the enemy of verification. And apply four practical rules: **stop, check, compare, and only then share.**»

The ethical bulwark and the collective response of the entire country system

This is accompanied by a renewed focus on ethical principles: «For some time, we have given renewed strength and attention to our **core values** (Homeland, discipline, honor, together with self-sacrifice, obedience, courage, loyalty, and a sense of duty and belonging) because, in my view, they represent **the last true bulwark against every form of cognitive attack.**»

However, the Chief of Staff concludes, «it would be a mistake to think that the response can be military alone. A cyberattack, a disinformation campaign, or the sabotage of critical infrastructure cannot be countered solely with Defense tools: **resilience depends on the entire country system**, namely on the integrated response of its institutions, businesses, media, and information sector, down to individual citizens.»

News link: https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/26_ottobre_03/attacchi-ibridi-generale-masiello-intervista-a67fed33-e465-4256-8584-2e30d1e45x1k.shtml?refresh_ce